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THE WILL.

BY MRS. M. WOLRYCHE-WHITMORE.

WHEN we begin to consider the human will, we feel at once that here we have something less material, more exalted, than the faculties which we have been considering hitherto. We come to the undefined border-land where flesh and spirit meet. We begin to see less of the noble and wonderfully made animal, and more of the living soul within. But yet the two—flesh and spirit—are so inseparable, so mutually dependent, and form together so perfect a whole, that we feel more strongly than ever the falseness of an asceticism which would separate them, and count the body as an enemy of the soul. Man, we feel, as a whole was made in the image of God. Flesh and spirit must, by the laws of our nature, go hand in hand. The body is not the enemy but the indispensable fellow-worker and servant of the soul.

“ Let us not always say,
 ‘ Spite of this flesh to-day
 I strove, made head, gained ground upon the
 whole !’
 As the bird wings and sings,
 Let us cry, ‘ All good things
 Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than
 flesh helps soul !’ ”

The will is seen by its effects in our physical, mental, and moral actions, but is not essential to them ; that is, our actions may be performed without the intervention of the will at all, and, indeed, a large proportion of the everyday routine of our lives is performed quite automatically, and no effort of will is necessary in the matter at all, except the initial effort to set the machinery in motion. Thus, for example, when we are called in the morning, some of us feel that a very decided effort of will is required to make us get up, but, this ordeal once over, the process of dressing goes on with no sense of effort at all, indeed, an effort would be

wanted to enable us to stop our movements and direct them in some different channel to the usual one. In this instance, though the will is not directly concerned and we have no consciousness of any effort, *indirectly* we are obeying a determination of the will, made long before and acted on at the time with a very pronounced effort indeed, but which has now, from long use, come to be carried out mechanically. There are certain muscular movements necessary to the maintenance of life which are entirely beyond the control of the will, such as the beating of the heart ; and all the muscles may move not only without the direction of the will but even against it, as in cramp, etc. Such movements, however, need not be considered here. We are all conscious that in the great majority of our actions we have the power of choice, and can exercise our own will in doing or leaving undone. Animals and very young children have not this power of self-control but act according to the motives which sway their inclinations at the moment. We control the animals by bringing appropriate motives to bear upon them, but the children, having the dormant power of will in them, we feel must be treated differently and helped to help themselves. The will must be drawn out and strengthened that they may acquire the power of controlling their own actions.

There are certain drugs, such as alcohol, opium, etc., which have the effect of increasing the automatic activity of the mind, and diminishing the volitional power of control. In dreaming, delirium, somnambulism, mesmerism, etc., the power of the will is entirely suspended. By comparing these states with the normal state we see the difference between volitional and automatic activity.

The will principally affects our actions in two ways : (1) by deciding upon a course of action ; (2) by setting the muscles in motion to carry out the decision, or by restraining the muscles from an action to which they are prompted by the pressure of motives. The way in which the will effects our decision is by the selection of certain subjects of attention to the exclusion of others. The will selects out of all the motives which press upon us and claim our attention a certain number, and limits our thoughts to these, keeping out of sight those which would impel us to act in a different manner. If the motives pressing upon us are of an emotional

kind, such as anger, the will operates by checking the impulse to immediate action, thus gaining time for reflection and allowing the first heat of the impulse to pass off.

We have seen that in our ordinary actions, so long as they pursue an accustomed course, we feel no effort; it is only when some opposing motive presents itself, or when we have to deviate from the ordinary routine, that the will comes consciously into play. In the same way when our thoughts are following each other in an accustomed groove, or wandering from subject to subject, as each presents itself in accordance with the laws of the association of ideas, no effort of will is necessary and we are conscious of none. But when we have to check the current of our thoughts and turn it in a new direction, or when we have to keep it fixed on one subject in spite of external distractions and interruptions, the effort of will becomes not only quite obvious to ourselves but sometimes even painful. Most mothers probably know what it is to attempt to do the household accounts with the children in the room. The effort needed and the fatigue experienced are equal to those which would be entailed in working out difficult problems of mathematics under other and more peaceful circumstances. When we are tired the mental effort to fix and keep the attention is far greater than when we are fresh, and the fatigue after such an exertion is proportionately greater. Great economies of mental labour may be effected by a judicious choice of time and place for the purpose. Work done regularly at the same time each day is done comparatively easily, because, the habit being formed, a much smaller effort of will is sufficient to collect and keep the thoughts. This rule, of course, holds good for the children as well as for ourselves. The will power necessary to keep the thoughts fixed in one particular train to the exclusion of all other subjects, and in spite of distractions, is an all-important one to our intellectual life, and, like all faculties, it becomes strengthened by practice and weakened by disuse. If we have been doing nothing for some time which calls for any steady intellectual effort, we find when we begin work again that our thoughts have got very much "out of hand," and when we wish to fix them upon any one point they are apt to fly off to anything and everything else. The effort required to keep up our attention

is most tiring and we get very little done. After a few days' steady effort, however, the power returns, and we are again able to do without effort or fatigue, an amount of work which would have presented insuperable difficulties a few days before.

The will is, moreover, concerned in our mental processes when we are not conscious of it, just as it may be concerned in our muscular movements without our being aware of any effort. In speaking we are interfering with the automatic regularity of our breathing without feeling an effort in doing so, and, in the same way, every thought which does not spontaneously follow the preceding thought is caused by an effort of will on our part. Every act of recollection, every choice or judgment, is under the guidance of the will and cannot take place without it.

The will has more to do than we might at first suppose with the formation of our beliefs and opinions, and this not directly but indirectly. Beliefs may be divided into two kinds: first, those about which there cannot be two opinions, and to which, if we understand them, we must at once assent (such as the axiom that two straight lines cannot enclose a space); and secondly, those about which there may be very different opinions formed by different people, all sincerely wishing to arrive at the truth. Our beliefs of the former kind are of course determined by the capacity of our own minds for receiving such belief, and increase with increasing knowledge and development. There are few subjects, however, upon which such perfect unanimity is possible, and with increasing complexity of considerations, individual responsibility of judgment increases also. The will acts on the formation of beliefs in two ways: first, by the influence which habitual self-discipline in intellectual matters exerts on the habit of mind of the individual. The holders of superstitions and prejudices are responsible for their errors to a certain extent, inasmuch as they might have become more enlightened by intellectual discipline and search for truth. We are indirectly responsible for our opinion on any particular subject,—that is, we are responsible for the habit of mind which originates that opinion.

The second way in which the will influences our opinions is by the degree of attention it gives to each of the different

considerations which go to make our decision. The will can keep out of sight any of these considerations and bring into prominence any others, and thus throw more weight into the one scale or the other. "There are none so blind as those who won't see." Our emotions are also apt to sway our judgment, and decisions arrived at overnight are often changed in the morning. The exceedingly fixed and unalterable character of the opinions of very young people, girls, perhaps, especially, is proverbial! Their judgment is weak and their emotions are strong. They have not yet experienced in their own minds, the necessarily progressive character of all knowledge and, consequently, of individual judgments.

"It is this progressive character which imparts to objective science one of its greatest elements of value as an intellectual discipline, and one of its greatest attractions as a pursuit. For what can be more conducive to a noble, but self-restrained independence of thought, than the conviction that whatever we may accept as authoritative in the teachings of those whom we regard as our best guides in any department of investigation, must be accepted provisionally, to be tested by the results of further enquiry, as our own conclusions will be in their turn?"

The principal motives which determine our conduct may be ranged under three heads. First, we are naturally impelled to act as we have acted before under similar circumstances. If we act habitually upon principles deliberately laid down, and originally carried out under the direction of the will, the habit thus formed is a great support, and we do automatically and without effort that which would otherwise need a great exertion of will.

The second great class of motives comprehends all those emotional states which go to influence our conduct; all desires and aversions, all prospect of pleasure or pain, and all prudential considerations leading us to anticipate future pleasure and pain. These motives of course very often come into conflict with the preceding ones. The following of the daily round is often made irksome, or inconvenient, or even imprudent by other considerations; we are tempted to deviate from our ordinary course by fear of the consequences, by the hope of pleasure, by ambition, anger, or any other

emotional motive. The decision between the conflicting motives falls to the will, which does its part by calling into action the reason, by fixing the attention on certain of the motives, and withdrawing it from others, by restraining from immediate action and gaining time for reflection, and last, but not least, by calling into operation the last of our three classes of motives, namely: Notions of Right and Duty. Such motives are most powerful when they gain the added force derived from a constant habit of acting on them. Desires and aversions which would run counter to them are "nipped in the bud" when questions of right and duty are always placed first. But even devotion to duty, noble and inspiring as it is, is not the highest possible ideal. "Even the idea of duty, *operating alone*, tends to reduce the individual to the subservience of a slave doing his master's bidding, rather than to make him master of himself; but it gives most powerful aid in the acquirement of that power of fixing the thoughts and affections on 'things on high', which most effectively detaches them from what is earthly and debasing. It is by the *assimilation*, rather than by the *subjugation*, of the human will to the divine, that man is really lifted towards God; and in proportion as this assimilation has been effected, does it manifest itself in the life and conduct; so that even the lowliest actions become holy ministrations in a temple consecrated by the felt presence of the Divinity. Such was the Life of the Saviour; towards that standard it is for the Christian disciple to aspire."